



# Arts & Culture Working Group

Advancing Arts & Culture-Based Approaches to Economic Development

This paper outlines the focus areas that the Arts & Culture Working Group (ACWG) prioritizes to support arts & culture-based approaches to economic development in Central Appalachia. The focus areas address three interdependent factors that champion a long-term strategy for vibrant and creative economies.

## Arts & Culture Driving Economic Development

Arts and Culture is often valued for its ability to enrich lives. More tangibly, it supports local economic development, better health outcomes, and higher educational attainment.

Central Appalachia enjoys rich artistic traditions in music, crafts, literature, and theatre, among others. As many communities transition their workforce to meet community needs, arts and culture hold untapped potential to foster creative economies that create new jobs and rejuvenate underutilized buildings and downtown corridors. Research shows that creative places attract a range of industries because such places become attractive locations to live, work, and play<sup>1</sup>. The following sections describe how the group's focus on creative placemaking, arts education, and cultural heritage will help create the foundation for cross-sector collaborations to grow and the creative economy to thrive.

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### Member Organizations

Appalachian Community Fund  
ArtPlace America  
The Educational Foundation of America  
Emily Hall Tremain Foundation  
The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation  
Thompson Charitable Foundation  
PhilCap Fund for Southeast Kentucky

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### Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking happens when an array of community, state, or regional stakeholders use arts and culture to advance community and economic development. The ACWG's focus on creative placemaking serves to promote entrepreneurial and inclusive approaches that elevate the ingenuity and promise of local solutions. It further fosters economic development by recirculating money into local economies and inherently takes an asset-based approach where artists and creatives use what is already present in the community to enhance, adapt, and rejuvenate it.

Grounded by its principle to strengthen residents' relationships to their place, the ACWG seeks to identify and support fruitful earning opportunities for artists and the creative economy, especially as the trend towards the "gig economy" grows. Tourism may also be an important component of a successful creative economy for some communities; however, the group hopes to identify strategies and best practices that address the common challenge that tourism-centric economic development often overshadows the interests of local residents. Specifically, the group is interested in learning from organizations and projects whose community planning practices are inclusive and beneficial for the community as a whole.

### Arts Education

The focus on arts education will support opportunities to advance a comprehensive approach to learning. Arts education is often the type of education that loses funding and is perceived as less important when teaching to the test. Between 1982 and 2008, students receiving any arts education declined from 65% to

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking*. (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010.) <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>.



50%<sup>2</sup>. The ACWG focus would make the case for arts education and its role in the Appalachian transition. For example, arts education teaches children how to make good judgements, understand multiple perspectives, think critically, and express emotions through creative means. Creative thinkers are excellent problem-solvers and with the rise of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) education, experts agree that the arts inform and intersect with multiple disciplines. Additionally, arts education helps spatial or kinesthetic learners grasp new concepts and often motivates those with behavioral challenges to stay in school. Lifting up arts education will result, over the long-term, in a better-educated workforce and more entrepreneurship, both of which support the Appalachian Transition.

## Cultural Heritage

One of the core issues that continues to undermine the Appalachian transition is a long-standing negative perception of Appalachia. Much of that perception stems from a narrative that Appalachian culture is backward and resistant to change. On the contrary, ACWG members hope to lift up an accurate, locally-created narrative that demonstrates Central Appalachia's rich artistic and creative history, which has challenged structural inequities and been a voice for positive social change. Changing the narrative is important externally and internally to the region: it is integral to attracting national philanthropic and private investment, and it promotes the sense of hope and pride for people to engage civically, think more entrepreneurially, and lead their communities to a better economic future.

Similarly, for Central Appalachians to feel a sense of hope and pride in their place, they need to feel included, valued, and safe. Thus, the more accurate narrative should recognize the contributions that marginalized populations have made to Appalachian culture and heritage. Looking forward, the ACWG seeks to promote community planning processes that include more diverse community members so that more perspectives are heard and their ideas are implemented. The Network will need to build an understanding of the region's identity and an analysis of the region's perception in order to communicate a more favorable narrative to national audiences. This focus on cultural heritage will inform not only the working groups future work together, but the Network's broader communications as well.

## Activities

Members of the emerging ACWG have developed a plan for its next phase of work. What follows is a general outline of those activities the group will pursue. The group expects that each activity will inform the other activities to produce a robust analysis of the current context and engaged, diverse members of the group.

- **Map and analyze the placemaking, arts education, and cultural heritage efforts in the region:** Identify where these programs occur, who leads them, and how (if at all) they connect to other efforts.
- **Connect with and learn from practitioners:** Build relationships and learn with the organizations and leaders who are doing work in placemaking, arts education, and cultural heritage.
- **Develop an analysis of the opportunities and challenges within each focus area:** Identify best practices and lessons learned to share with funders, practitioners, and local decision-makers.
- **Share and use the analysis:** Individual members use the analysis to initiate collaborations with local, regional, and national funders, as well as local leaders and intermediaries in the region.
- **Promote regional approaches to placemaking:** Serve as a platform for regional placemaking strategies to sow and flourish so that the impacts reach beyond hub cities and into small towns.

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<sup>2</sup> Nick Rabkin and E.C. Hedberg, *Arts Education in America: What declines in mean for arts participation* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2011): <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008-SPPA-ArtsLearning.pdf>.



## Expected Long-Term Results

Members of the emerging ACWG expect that pursuit of the above activities will, over the long-term, lead to the following results for the region and the Network.

- Ongoing communication and increased peer support exists among funders and practitioners working to support arts and culture.
- Funders make new and more impactful investments in arts and culture.
- Placemaking efforts are more aligned and collaborative.
- New members join the Network.
- New funders begin to invest in arts and culture efforts.
- Local leaders leverage more state and federal resources towards creative placemaking-focused community development
- Intermediaries have the analysis and financial capacity to support placemakers and artists.
- More artists earn a livable wage from their craft
- Communities experience more grassroots leadership and civic engagement.
- Arts education activities are better connected and integrated across disciplines.
- A more positive narrative, grounded in Appalachia's cultural history, driven by its imaginative potential, and created by the people who live in the region, begins to emerge.